

# A MESSAGE FROM . . .



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In the past year the state's financial situation has been one of the most critical issues affecting our state. During this current budget year the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) is operating under an 18 % decrease in general fund appropriations from last year. As with any financial cut of this amount, things have to change. We have initiated several cost saving initiatives that will affect the way we do business in the future. I have outlined our situation below.

## The Facts

- Seventy-one percent of Alabama's land base is covered with forests.
- Alabama is the second largest commercial forest in the nation with 22.9 million acres of forestland. Our neighbor Georgia is number one with 24.4 million acres.
- The forest products industry is the number one manufacturing industry in the state contributing \$13 billion to the state's economy annually.
- There are approximately 440,000 forest ownerships in Alabama.
- Private family forest landowners own approximately 78 % of Alabama's forests. These are the people the Commission serves on a day-to-day basis.
- There are 1,936 certified TREASURE Forests in Alabama managing approximately 1,833,000 acres of land under the TREASURE management concept.
- During the 2002-2003 fiscal year, the AFC handled 1,350 fires that burned approximately 12,406 acres. This is the lowest average for both fires and acreage since 1941. The five-year average for number of fires and acres burned is 4,000 fires and 40,000 acres.
- Last year AFC firefighters personnel kept the average size fire to 9.1 acres and saved 382 homes and 146 other structures.
- The Commission supports approximately 1000 rural volunteer fire departments.

## The Budget

- Since the 1994 budget year, the Commission total budget has decreased from just over \$26 million to below \$24 million.
- The AFC ranks 11th in the south in dollars spent per forested acre, \$1.23. We are below the southern average of \$1.76 per acre. Florida is number one with \$3.86, North Carolina number two spending \$2.71, and Georgia number three at \$1.91.

## Our People

- Seventy-five percent of the AFC budget goes to personnel.
- In the 1991 budget year the Commission had 529 employees. Today the AFC has approximately 342 employees – 187 less than 1991.
- Although the Commission saw an 18 % decrease in state General Fund appropriations, only those positions not already filled were lost.
- Currently there have been 47 budgeted positions cut (or 14 % of our manpower) in the Commission.
- Alabama is second among the southern states in forested acres with 22.9 million acres, but 13th or last in number of agency personnel per million acres of forestland.

Although the Alabama Forestry Commission will not be participating in many of the activities and programs that we have in the past, we will remain the leader in wildfire suppression and we will be providing technical assistance to landowners just as we always have. Unfortunately, one of the cutbacks will be *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine which will be limited to three issues per year.

The Alabama Forestry Commission is one of the most cost effective forestry agencies in the nation and we will continue to provide the best services possible to the citizens of our state with the appropriations we are given. ♣